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ABSTRACT

Traditional Chinese personality characteristics such as inner harmony, concern for others, submissiveness to authority, and respect for learning so pervade Chinese biographies that they constitute cultural themes. In order to determine whether such themes are more evident in Chinese than in Western youth, a cross-cultural study of self-concept was conducted. Samples of primary school children from Taiwan and the United States (numbering 936 and 762, respectively) were administered the McDaniel-Piers Young Children's Self-Concept Scale, a 40-item instrument designed to generate yes or no responses to statements referring to respondent's self. Data were analyzed by separately calculating for boys and girls at each primary school grade level the percent of pupils responding to each item. Items showing consistently large differences between the two cultures were identified, and items with similar content were grouped. Taiwanese and American children were found to differ greatly and consistently in self-perception on items related to physical appearance, peer acceptance, and school skills. Two smaller item clusters were identified--one reflecting perceived evaluation of others, a second reflecting attitudes about family characteristics. Large differences were found on some items in these clusters. Substantial differences were also found on five unrelated items. Results are discussed in relationship to traditional themes of Chinese culture. Most items of the instrument used are included in data tables. (RH)

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COMPARISONS OF SELF-CONCEPT SCORES
OF CHILDREN
IN AMERICA AND IN TAIWAN

A Paper Presented
at a NATO Conference:
Human Assessment and Cultural Factors

Kingston, Ontario, Canada
August, 1981

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COMPARISONS OF SELF-CONCEPT SCORES OF CHILDREN IN AMERICA
AND IN TAIWAN

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The relationship between psychology and anthropology was the topic of the presidential address to the Royal Anthropological Institute in England in 1923 (Hallowell, 1953). Since that time, personality and cultural studies have been marked by such distinguished names as Bateson, Benedict, Kardiner, Kluckhohn, Mead and many others. Klineberg (1980) provides a historical perspective on cross-cultural psychology prior to 1960 and Triandis (1980) reviews the trends in cross-cultural research over the last 10 years. According to Triandis, studies in the area of social, personality and developmental psychology account for 50% of the articles published in the Journal for Cross-Cultural Psychology over the past decade.

Within the area of personality and culture, very few studies have employed self concept measures. McDaniel and Bustamante (1979) compared the self-concepts of children in Mexico and the United States, and among other findings, report that the United States children seem more concerned about their feelings and behaviors than do the Mexican children. More recently, Lerner, Iwawaki, Chihara and

Sorell (1980) found that Japanese adolescents appear to have lower self-esteems and have less favorable views of their bodies than do American youth. Additionally, Learner, et al. found no interrelation among self-esteem and body attitudes for the Japanese adolescents, a finding which contrasts with the linkage of these variables among American samples.

Such findings lead to conjectures about the emergence of self-concept in a variety of cultural settings. If, as Benedict (1946) asserts, Japanese culture stresses "taking one's proper station" then self-concept may well be more closely linked to the manner in which one assumes and discharges roles assigned by virtue of age, sex, family, class and other distinctions as opposed to individual attributes such as good looks or special skills.

Chinese culture represents another instance in which prescriptive modes of conduct seem to predominate over individually achieved status. Heiliger (1980) describes the traditional Chinese personality as characterized by moderation, harmony of reasoning and feeling, soberness, peacefulness of mind and concern for the good of others. These characteristics are supported by Confucian principles for the conduct of life which emphasize submissiveness to authority, submissiveness to the mores, non-competitiveness self-respect, prudence, courage, sense of responsibility,

love of traditional learning and punctiliousness in treatment of others. "Some of these attitudes and behavior patterns occur again and again in Chinese biographies. A few of them appear decisive in shaping the lives and characters of many human beings. They are so pervasive as to constitute themes or patterns..." (Heiliger, 1980, p. 136).

If these are the themes and patterns of traditional Chinese culture, then it would seem reasonable to see such themes reflected in the perceptions and attitudes of children socialized in a Chinese culture. More specifically, are such themes more readily observed in children raised in a Chinese culture than in children raised in a Western society where individualism, competitiveness, and independence represent prominent cultural values. To examine this question, self-concept measures were obtained for a large sample of children from Tiawan and from the United States.

Procedure

Instruments The McDaniel-Piers Young Children's Self-Concept Scale (McDaniel, et. al. 1973) is a downward extension of the well known Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale (Piers, 1969). The downward extension contains 40 items read orally by the teacher, for example, "I am often sad." The child responds "yes" or "no" on a special answer sheet. The test is appropriate for children in grades 1 through 3 and reliability coefficients at these grade levels range from

.72 to .92. The scale was translated into Chinese by one of the authors (Soong).

Subjects The Taiwanese subjects for this study were enrolled in grades one through three in a large school (2000) students located in Kaohsiung, a city in southern Taiwan, Republic of China. The class size in this school ranges from 50 to 50 pupils. The socioeconomic class of most parents would be considered upper-middle with occupations represented by ministerial officers, teachers, store owners, white collar and some blue collar workers. The self-concept scale was administered to 936 children in the primary grades. Tests were administered by the class teachers.

The United States sample was drawn from elementary schools in Cleveland, Ohio; Witchita, Kansas; and Fort Worth, Texas. Within each city, classes were selected to represent inner city, middle income and suburban neighborhoods about equally. A total of 762 children were tested in grades 1 through 3 by their classroom teachers.

Data Analysis The percent of pupils responding positively to each of the self-concept items was examined separately for boys and girls at each grade level within the two cultural settings. Items showing consistently large differences between the two cultures were identified, and those items with similar content were grouped.

Results

The findings suggest at least three areas of self-perception in which large and consistent differences may be observed between the children in Taiwan and the American children: physical appearance, acceptance by peers and school skills.

Physical Appearance Table 1 presents the percent of each group responding positively to the items of the self-concept scale dealing with physical appearance. The data

Insert Table 1 about here

in Table 1 reveal markedly fewer Chinese children than American children agreeing that they have nice looking physical features. Girls in both cultures more readily admit being pretty than do the boys. A distinctive feature of these data is the sharp decline from grade 1 to grade 3 in the percent of Chinese children who claim good looks, while the American sample maintains a uniformly high percentage of children who feel that they have attractive features. Figure 1 illustrates these trends across grade levels.

Insert Figure 1 about here

A second area in which major differences occur between the Chinese and American children relates to feelings of being accepted by the peer group. Table 2 shows the percent of children in each group responding with the keyed answer to items describing peer relationships.

Insert Table 2 about here

Inspection of the data in Table 2 reveals that Chinese boys and girls experience less difficulty in feeling accepted by their peers than do their American counterparts. Overt aggression as indicated by fights is less characteristic of Chinese children than American children, and Chinese girls seem particularly free of involvement in fights.

The trend across grade levels shows rather sharp increases in feelings of acceptance as the Chinese children move from grade 1 to grade 3, but no corresponding improvement in peer acceptance is seen among the American children as they move up the grade levels. These trends are illustrated in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 about here

A third area in which consistent differences occur between the responses of the Chinese and the American children relates to school skills and attitudes. Here, the Chinese children show less positive perceptions than do the American children, with the one exception of the overall attitude toward school. The percentage of pupils responding positively to each of the school related items is shown in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

As can be noted from Table 3, Chinese children appear to be more fearful of tests and less confident that they are adequate in school skills than are the American children. There is a tendency in both cultures for more girls than boys to judge themselves good in school work. Almost all Chinese children reject the idea that they hate school, while a comparatively larger portion of the American children accept the notion that they hate school.

The trends across grade levels are interesting. At the first grade level, the responses of Chinese and American children are almost indistinguishable for most of the items in this cluster; then the Chinese children show a rather sharp drop in perceptions of their school skills. The American children, particularly the girls, maintain a high

level of regard for their school skills. Figure 3 illustrates the trend across grade levels for perception of reading ability.

Insert Figure 3 about here

In addition to the major clusters of items discussed, two smaller clusters were identified. The first of these seems to reflect the perceived evaluations of others and shows considerable differences among the Chinese and American groups. Table 4 presents this cluster of items and the percent of each group responding with the keyed response.

Insert Table 4 about here

It can be seen from the data in Table 4 that there is a distinct drop from grade 1 to the next higher grades in the proportion of Chinese children who feel that they are important members of the class and that their ideas are liked by others. While there are declines from grade 1 to grade 3 in the proportion of American children responding positively to these items, the declines are much less sharp and they do not approach the low percentage of children responding positively in the Chinese groups. Figure 4

illustrates the trends across grade levels for these variables.

Insert Figure 4 about here

The second small cluster of items describes the child's perception of his status in the family, the acceptability of his home behavior and the extent to which such behavior is meeting parents' expectations. Table 5 presents the data in the area of family behavior.

Insert Table 5 about here

The data in Table 5 suggest that there is a tendency for the Chinese children to report less frequently than American children that they are an important member of the family. The largest differences, however, occur with respect to the behavior in the home. As the Chinese children progress from grade 1 to grade 3, they appear to feel less and less that they behave well at home. The American children, on the other hand, appear to maintain a high level of belief in the acceptability of their home behavior. Figure 5 illustrates the trends across grade levels for responses to the question about home behavior.

Insert Figure 5 about here

There were five items on which large differences occur between the Chinese and the American sample, but which do not describe a homogeneous set of behaviors. These items range from fear of meeting new people to wanting one's own way. This group of miscellaneous items is presented in Table 6.

Insert Table 6 about here

From the data in Table 6 it appears that more Chinese children than American children are apprehensive about meeting new people. More American children than Chinese report that they do many bad things, think of things they shouldn't do, are lucky and want their own way most of the time.

Of the 40 items on the self concept scale, 13 items exhibited little difference between the two samples, or where differences occurred, they were evident for one sex only. To complete the record, these items and the percent of each group responding in the keyed direction are listed in Table 7.

Insert Table 7 about here

Discussion

Earlier we identified some characteristics of traditional Chinese personality including moderation, inner harmony, concern for others, submissiveness to authority, non-competitiveness, sense of responsibility and respect for learning. We proposed that some of these themes might be reflected in the self-concept measures obtained from Chinese children when compared with responses of American children.

One of the consistent differences between the responses of the Chinese children and the American children was in the area of physical appearances. At the third grade level, only about a third of the Chinese boys indicate that they have nice hair, a nice face or that they are good looking. The corresponding figure for American boys is about two-thirds. While more girls in each culture indicate that they have nice features, the difference between the two cultures is large. This finding is consistent with the results reported by Learner, Iwawaki, Chihara and Sorell (1980) indicating that Japanese youth have less favorable views of their bodies than do American adolescents. Considering the emphasis in Chinese culture on inner harmony and right conduct, it may not be surprising that exterior features of

one's self are not singled out for emphasis or considered unusually important. The fact that the number of children in the Chinese sample who indicate that they have nice looking features declines sharply from grade 1 to grade 3 suggests that acculturation processes may play a relatively large role in this phase of the child's self-perception.

A second observation in comparing responses of the two groups is that the Chinese children appear much more frequently to feel that they are a part of the group than do American children. While a little more than half of the 3rd grade American children feel that they are left out, only about a quarter of the Chinese children report this feeling. Items reflecting aggressive behavior, being ridiculed by classmates, difficulty in making friends or being chosen for games all favored the Chinese children over the American children. Again, this finding is consistent with the expectations that might be derived from Chinese emphasis on concern for others and proper conduct with respect to others.

In the area of schooling, much more anxiety is associated with tests among Chinese than among American children, and this seems consistent with the importance assigned high

scholastic achievement in Chinese culture. Substantially fewer Chinese children than American children report that they have good school skills, again, perhaps, reflecting the high expectations held for school achievement. In spite of the apparent demands for achievement and test anxiety, only 10 percent of the Chinese third grade pupils indicate that they hate school compared with a third of the American boys and a fourth of the American girls at this grade level marking that they hate school. The traditional respect for scholarship in Chinese culture may well be a factor in understanding these differences.

It is interesting to note that in both cultures, more girls report that they are good at school work than do boys. This advantage for girls has generally been attributed to differences in developmental rates and one might expect developmental rates to be constant across cultures. When examining the responses to the item, "I am a good reader", however, the advantage in favor of girls is not observable among the Chinese sample. Forty-five percent of both the Chinese boys and girls respond "yes" to this item in contrast to 44 percent of the American girls and 74 percent of the American boys. Since learning to read Chinese places a greater burden on spatial abilities than learning to read English, it may be that the frequently observed male advantage

in spatial skills" (Maccoby & Jacklin 1974) helps erase the developmental differences between boys and girls in perceived reading skill among the Chinese sample.

Related to the area of school skills are three items asking children whether they feel that they are important members of their class and whether their friends and classmates like the things they think up. Responses to all three items show a sharply smaller percentage of Chinese children responding positively to these items than American children. The Chinese children are all in much larger classes than the American children, and it is possible that this situational factor made it more difficult to feel an important member of the class or to share ideas with other classmates. Traditional Chinese cultural values would tend to minimize the individual's role in the group and focus attention on the goals of the group as a whole. This, coupled with the traditional humbleness with which one presents himself in Chinese culture, could well account for the relatively small percent of Chinese children who are willing to affirm that friends and classmates like their ideas.

The traditional orientation to subjugate self to the larger group may be operating in the cluster of items related to family characteristics. A slightly smaller percentage of Chinese children than American children agree that they are an important member of the family. This comes as some

surprise given the traditional closeness of Chinese family life.

Strict standards of behavior in the traditional Chinese home may help explain the rather large differences in favor of the American children who report that they behave well at home. More Chinese boys, however, feel that they are meeting parental expectations than do American boys. On the other hand, fewer Chinese girls feel that they are meeting parental expectations than their American counterparts. Whether the traditional valuing of sons over daughters in Chinese families enters into the Chinese girl's perceptions of not meeting parental expectations is an interesting speculation.

No attempt is made to interpret individual items which did not fall within the clusters identified for this study. They are included as part of the record and may be of value to individuals with special interest in some aspect of self-concept or a particular feature of Chinese culture.

The use of tests and questionnaires in cross-cultural research has the recognized limitation that questions may, and often do, take on different meanings within varying cultural contexts. Nevertheless, Klineberg observes: "It remains true that tests, whether of intelligence or personality, may yield valuable information regarding the ways in which particular cultural groups see the world and its

problems (Klineberg, 1980, p. 52). In this case, we have found sizable differences in Chinese children and American children with respect to perception of physical attractiveness, ease in becoming an accepted member of the group, adequacy of school skills, and the acceptability of home related behavior. These findings seem to be consistent with some of the traditional values of Chinese culture.

These findings, of course, must be tested through replication. Then, as Seligman urged almost 60 years ago, close collaboration of psychologists and anthropologists will be required to extract the fullest meaning from these findings for generalizations about personality and culture.

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Table I
Physical Appearance - Percent Responding
with Keyed Answer

Item	Key	Grade	Boys		Girls	
			<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>
am strong	yes	1	70	78	72	61
		2	54	80	55	53
		3	66	74	49	60
pretty eyes	yes	1	70	78	82	86
		2	50	66	54	84
		3	52	64	56	87
nice hair	yes	1	72	67	74	80
		2	36	66	58	80
		3	34	64	47	79
nice face	yes	1	71	79	74	84
		2	35	72	47	78
		3	37	69	43	78
good looking	yes	1	64	75	78	77
		2	28	69	35	78
		3	34	66	40	72

Table 2
Peer Acceptance - Percent Responding
with Keyed Answer

Item	Key	Grade	Boys		Girls	
			<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>
feel left out	no	1	60	59	64	53
		2	78	59	78	53
		3	73	54	69	55
get into fights	no	1	68	54	72	74
		2	79	60	90	76
		3	81	59	88	68
classmates make fun of me	no	1	72	66	75	62
		2	84	67	80	68
		3	73	66	78	56
hard to make friends	no	1	56	60	57	55
		2	81	64	82	63
		3	80	73	84	70
last to be chosen for games	no	1	66	58	68	57
		2	76	56	77	59
		3	74	52	64	58

Table 3
School Skills & Attitudes - Percent Responding
with Keyed Answer

Item	Key	Grade	Boys		Girls	
			<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>
afraid of tests	no	1	70	80	66	78
		2	52	76	54	74
		3	42	72	28	67
good in schoolwork	yes	1	80	82	74	84
		2	53	72	69	81
		3	41	75	52	84
good reader	yes	1	78	77	79	79
		2	60	80	67	82
		3	45	74	45	83
am smart	yes	1	73	76	75	79
		2	47	76	50	79
		3	48	74	44	78
hate school	no	1	68	70	73	79
		2	89	65	89	81
		3	90	65	90	75

Table 4
Good Ideas - Percent Responding
with Keyed Answer

Item	Key	Grade	Boys		Girls	
			<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>
am important member of class	yes	1	70	71	70	74
		2	34	66	54	71
		3	44	57	45	65
friends like things I think up	yes	1	71	67	77	72
		2	49	72	48	73
		3	49	71	40	63
classmates like things I think up	yes	1	63	64	81	65
		2	32	65	41	66
		3	31	55	33	53

Table 5
Family Characteristics - Percent Responding
with Keyed Answer

Item	Key	Grade	Boys		Girls	
			<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>
am important member of family	yes	1	70	76	74	80
		2	54	81	56	82
		3	72	79	70	83
behave well at home	yes	1	73	83	83	90
		2	53	80	65	84
		3	49	81	50	83
parents think I should do better	no	1	37	33	34	35
		2	32	29	31	34
		3	37	29	29	42

Table 6
Miscellaneous Items - Percent Responding
with Keyed Answer

Item	Key	Grade	Boys		Girls	
			<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>
meeting new people scares me	no	1	50	68	52	68
		2	38	68	33	66
		3	42	66	37	66
I do many bad things	no	1	73	76	72	83
		2	53	76	67	79
		3	46	70	47	80
I think of doing things I shouldn't	no	1	63	55	64	58
		2	78	47	77	50
		3	75	40	84	44
am lucky	yes	1	77	73	80	80
		2	49	76	48	82
		3	54	79	53	79
I want my own way	no	1	32	54	38	61
		2	29	57	36	57
		3	36	55	33	57

Table 7
Miscellaneous Items (Little Difference)
Percent Responding with Keyed Answer

Item	Key	Grade	Boys		Girls	
			<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>
am often sad	no	1	60	73	55	69
		2	67	69	63	67
		3	72	75	69	73
cause trouble to my family	no	1	60	76	75	64
		2	66	74	74	73
		3	56	69	83	66
think up good things to do	no	1	73	84	75	87
		2	71	82	73	85
		3	81	84	78	85
if have a hard time doing something I stop doing it	no	1	69	63	64	68
		2	73	68	78	67
		3	81	67	85	72
mean to others in	no	1	63	80	67	84
		2	76	83	71	86
		3	71	78	81	79

Table 7 - Continued
Miscellaneous Items (Little Difference)
Percent Responding with Keyed Answer

Item	Key	Grade	Boys		Girls	
			<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>
often get into trouble	no	1	56	65	67	76
		2	65	62	68	74
		3	59	56	69	72
often upset	no	1	63	64	59	63
		2	67	63	62	62
		3	60	65	72	65
often mean to other people	no	1	67	83	67	88
		2	77	80	79	88
		3	76	78	80	80
am happy	yes	1	78	77	79	88
		2	72	82	69	89
		3	74	82	74	86
family disappointed in me	no	1	62	72	63	79
		2	75	75	82	83
		3	81	78	84	89

Table 7 - Continued
Miscellaneous Items (Little Difference)
Percent Responding with Keyed Answer

Item	Key	Grade	Boys		Girls	
			<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>American</u>
wish I were different	no	1	51	52	55	64
		2	44	62	52	59
		3	44	53	53	60
when I try to make something, every- thing goes wrong	no	1	55	54	61	55
		2	75	60	72	62
		3	58	46	62	45
always dropping or breaking things	no	1	66	76	80	81
		2	74	76	84	75
		3	80	74	80	74

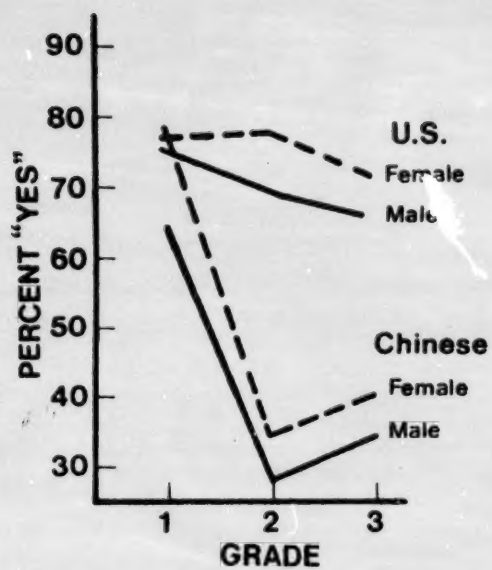


Figure 1. I am goodlooking

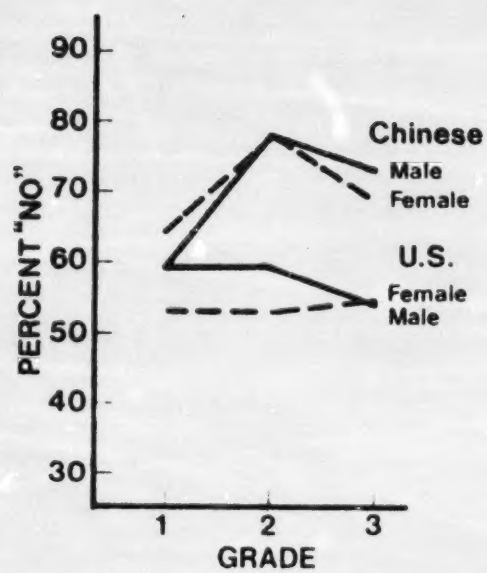


Figure 2. I feel left out of things

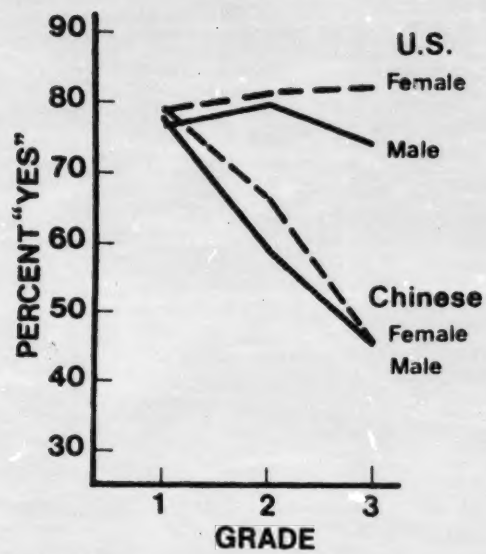


Figure 3. I am a good reader

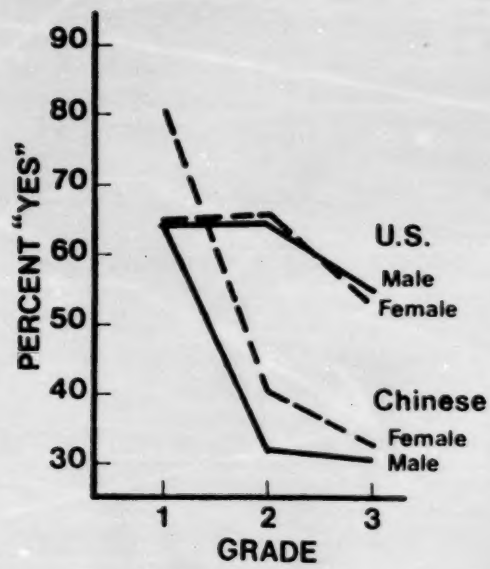


Figure 4. My classmates like the things I think up

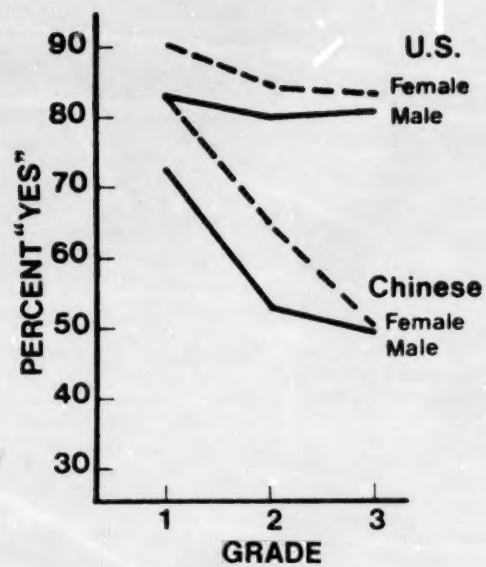


Figure 5. I behave well at home